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H.B. NO. 2374-76

A Bill for an Act Relating to Revision of Rates, Fares, and Charges of Public Utilities.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. Section 269-16, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

“Sec. 269-16 Regulate rates, etc., hearings, notice of hearings, appeals. (a)

All rates, fare, charges, classifications, schedules, rules, and practices made, charged, or observed by any public utility, or by two or more public utilities jointly, shall be just and reasonable and shall be filed with the public utilities commission.

(b) No rate, fare, charge, classification, schedule, rule, or practice, other than one established pursuant to an automatic rate adjustment clause previously approved by the commission, shall be established, abandoned, modified, or departed from by any public utility, except after thirty days' notice to the commission and prior approval by the commission for any increases in rates, fares, or charges. The notice herein provided for shall plainly state the rate, fare, charge, classification, schedule, rule, or practice proposed to be established, abandoned, modified, or departed from and the proposed effective date thereof and shall be given by filing the notice with the commission and keeping it open for public inspection. The commission may, in its discretion and for good cause shown, allow any rate, fare, charge, classification, schedule, rule, or practice to be established, abandoned, modified, or departed from upon notice less than that provided for herein. A contested case hearing shall be held in connection with any increase in rates and such hearing shall be preceded by a public hearing at which the consumers or patrons of the public utility may present testimony to the commission concerning the increase. The public hearing shall be an advertised public hearing or hearings on the island on which the utility is situated. Notice of the advertised hearing, with the purpose thereof, and the date, time, and place at which it will open, shall be advertised not less than once in each of three weeks in a newspaper published in and of general circulation in the State, the first publication being not less than twenty-one days before the public hearing and the last publication being not more than two days before the scheduled hearing. The applicant or applicants will notify their consumers or patrons of the proposed change in rates and of the time and place of the public hearing not less than one week before the date set, the manner and the fact of notification to be reported to the commission before the date of hearing. The commission is authorized to use such additional media as radio or television to advise the public if it finds it necessary to do so. The commission, upon notice to the public utility, may suspend the operation of all or any part of the proposed rate, fare, charge, classification, schedule, rule, or practice or any proposed abandonment or modification thereof or departure therefrom and after a hearing by order regulate, fix, and change all such rates, fares, charges, classifications, schedules, rules, and practices, so that the same shall be just and reasonable, and prohibit rebates and unreasonable discrimination between localities, or between users or consumers, under substantially similar conditions, regulate the manner in which the property of every public utility is operated with reference to the safety and accommodation of the public, prescribe its form and method of keeping accounts, books, and records, and its accounting system, regulate the return upon its public utility property, the incurring of indebtedness relating to its public utility business, and its financial transactions, and do all things in addition

which are necessary and in the exercise of such power and jurisdiction, all of which as so ordered, regulated, fixed, and changed shall be just and reasonable, and such as shall provide a fair return on the property of the utility actually used or useful for public utility purposes.

(c) The commission may in its discretion and after public hearing, upon showing by a public utility of probable entitlement and financial need, authorize temporary increases in rates, fares, and charges; provided that the commission shall by order require the public utility to return in the form of an adjustment to rates, fares, or charges to be billed in the future any amounts, with interest at a rate equal to the rate of return on such public utility's rate base found to be reasonable by the commission, received by reason of such continued operation which are in excess of the rates, fares, or charges finally determined to be just and reasonable by the commission. Interest on any such excess shall commence as of the date that any rate, fare, or charge goes into effect which results in any such excess and shall continue to accrue on the balance of any such excess until returned.

(d) The commission shall make every effort to complete its deliberations and issue its decision as expeditiously as possible and before nine months from the date the public utility filed its completed application; provided that in carrying out this mandate the commission shall require all parties to a proceeding to comply strictly with procedural time schedules which it establishes. If a decision is rendered after the nine-month period, the commission shall in writing report the reasons therefor to the Legislature within thirty days after rendering the decision.

The nine-month period in this subsection shall begin only after a completed application has been filed with the commission and a copy served on the consumer advocate. The commission shall establish standards concerning the data required to be set forth in the application in order for it to be deemed a completed application. The consumer advocate may within twenty-one days after receipt object to the sufficiency of any application and the commission shall hear and determine any such objection within twenty-one days after the same is filed. If the commission finds that the objections are without merit, the application shall be deemed to have been completed upon original filing. If the commission finds the application to be incomplete, it shall require the applicant to submit an amended application consistent with its findings and the nine-month period shall not commence until the amended application is filed.

(e) In any case of two or more organizations, trades, or businesses (whether or not incorporated, whether or not organized in the State of Hawaii, and whether or not affiliated) owned or controlled directly or indirectly by the same interests, the commission may distribute, apportion, or allocate gross income, deductions, credits or allowances between or among the organizations, trades, or businesses, if it determines that the distribution, apportionment, or allocation is necessary in order to adequately reflect the income of any such organizations, trades, or businesses to carry out the regulatory duties imposed by this section.

(f) From every order made by the commission under the provisions of this chapter which is final, or if preliminary is of the nature defined by section 91-14(a), an appeal shall lie to the supreme court only by a person aggrieved in the

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contested case hearing provided for under this section in the manner and within the time provided by the rules of court for an appeal from a judgment of a circuit court. The appeal shall not of itself stay the operation of the order appealed from, but the supreme court may stay the order after a hearing upon a motion therefor, and may impose such conditions as it may deem proper as to giving a bond and keeping the necessary accounts or otherwise in order to secure a restitution of the excess charges, if any, made during the pendency of the appeal in case the order appealed from should be sustained, reversed, or modified in whole or in part.”

SECTION 2. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed. New material is underscored. In printing this Act, the revisor of statutes need not include the brackets, the bracketed material, or the underscoring.*

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved April 9, 1976).

*Edited accordingly.